

# HOW FAY FOSTER WROTE "THE AMERICANS COME!"

Story of One of the Most Popular Songs of the Day—Miss Foster "Didn't Intend to Write a War Song"—Its Faith and Pride in Our Men Is the Note That Touched the Public Heart, She Believes

THIS is the story of a song—an American song, by an American girl, with American soldiers as the theme.

"Oh," you say, "a war song!" thinking dimly of the hundreds that have flooded your desk and piano in the last two years.

Well, yes, a war song. But if you are one of the singers who have thrilled at watching whole audiences rise to their feet as you sang the last notes of "The Americans Come!" or if from the audience you have been swept to France on the wings of imagery that the song supplies, you will understand that this war song is "different."

It is different for several reasons. In the first place, Fay Foster, the composer, had definitely decided that she would not write a war song. Miss Foster has very clearly defined ideas on the subject of war-profiteering, and she felt that many of the so-called war songs on the market came under this highly undesirable heading. And the composer of "One Golden Day" resolved that under no conditions would she add another song to the list of those that had the war as their theme. Then, one day last January, she chanced to read a poem in *Munsey's*. It was by Elizabeth A. Wilbur, a name unknown in the list of lyric writers. It told simply and briefly the story of a blinded French soldier, who stands in his cottage window while his grandson describes the arrival of American troops and the passing of the American colors. And the picture gripped Miss Foster's imagination. The poem stood on her piano for days, while the thought of khaki-clad men marching through French village streets to the strains of "Over There" returned and returned each time she looked at it. Finally she sat down at the piano one morning and in an hour's time "The Americans Come!" was written.

And then the misgivings of the creative mind returned in full force. It had been apparently so easy. Was it worth while? Did it, after all, give the message the composer hoped to convey? Did it picture the cheer and inspiration, the renewal of courage, that came into French hearts when they saw those ranks of lean, young, brown-clad figures? For five months the manuscript lay in Miss Foster's desk. Then she decided to show it to her publishers. And J. Fischer & Brothers looked at the song and then rushed it to the printer.

That was last June. The rest of the story is one with which most of you are familiar. For "The Americans Come!" published six months ago, has been sung all over America. It has appeared on the program at penitentiary concerts and in church services; it was the great rallying song of the last Liberty Loan drive; it is being sung over eight vaudeville circuits and by practically every concert singer of note. When John McCormack entertained the heroes of the Château-Thierry fight it was "The Americans Come!" that he sang at their request. The list of grand opera singers who have placed it on their programs includes Paul Althouse, David Bispham, Eleanore de Cisneros, Marcella Craft, Vernon D'Arnalle, Rafaelo Diaz, Florence Easton, Mme. Schumann-Heink, Mary Jordan, Margaret Keyes, John McCormack, Arthur Middleton, Lucien Muratore, Marie Rappold, Vernon Stiles, Marie Sundelius, Yvonne de Tréville, Reinald Werrenrath, Morgan Kingston, Dora Gibson, Francis Ingram, Lila Robeson and Margaret Romaine.

It has been said that no one may analyze, classify or understand the reasons that make the public take one song to its heart and reject another. I asked Miss Foster if she could tell me why



Photo by Central News Photo Service

"The Americans Come!" stood out from the mass of war songs and won instant recognition.

"Perhaps it was because I did not intend to write a war song," was the answer. "I know it sounds banal to say that the song 'wrote itself,' but that is really what happened. I believe that one of the factors in its success has been its great simplicity. You cannot write in complicated form of the American soldier and the great task to which he was consecrated. The moment that a song of the war became complicated that moment it lost touch with the subject.

"The war brought us back to fundamentals—and fundamentals do not recognize class distinction or intellectual gradations. And, apparently, the song struck a chord that brought a response from all kinds of people. When I read the poem first it thrilled me to the depths of my being; I was unable to read it without weeping, and in giving it a musical form I hope that I wove in something of the emotion that stirred me. The song doesn't preach—how I dislike those things that attempt to tell the men about duty and consecration—and it has none of the spirit of boastfulness. But it does hold the pride and faith in our men which, as Americans, we have all shared, and I believe that is the note to which everyone has responded on hearing it."

### No Time to Rest on Laurels

Perhaps you think that the writer of a song success has an easy time of it—that she rests on her laurels. Well, Miss Foster has gained laurels aplenty, it is true, but not the time to rest on them. She has been busy ever since the "The Americans Come!" first appeared in writing arrangements of it. It was first published in four keys. Now it has been arranged for male voices, for women's voices and for mixed choruses. Incidentally, three great New York choruses, the Rubinstein, the Mendelssohn and the Apollo Club of Brooklyn, are singing it in concerts on the same evening this week, and one of Miss Foster's greatest perplexities on the day that I talked with her was the attempt to devise some plan whereby she might hear them all. Orchestras and military bands are playing it; it has been arranged as a musical recitation, and both French and Italian translations have been made. Publishers are reluctant about giving



On the Upper Left John McCormack May Be Seen Singing "The Americans Come" to a Group of Wounded Heroes from Château-Thierry; on the Upper Right, Fay Foster, Gifted American Composer; Below, Climax of the Song That All America Is Singing



out figures on their song successes, but it is a significant fact that one press alone could not put out enough copies of "The Americans Come!" to satisfy the public demand, and two presses run constantly in order to keep the supply going.

Yvonne de Tréville's presentation of the song shortly after it had been published was a dramatic incident, for on the day that she was to sing it for the first time Mme. de Tréville received a letter saying that the German invaders had commandeered her home in Brussels. Was it any wonder that she sang with such intensity of feeling that the audience rose to their feet, cheering and applauding?

"The greatest pleasure that the song has given me," said Miss Foster, "has been the joy of presenting it in concerts for the soldiers. Ever since early last summer I have appeared in the camps three or four times a week, sometimes

oftener. And it is such joy to realize that the boys have taken the song to their hearts and continually ask for it when concert singers visit the camps."

And the letters that come to her—letters of thankfulness from soldiers here and abroad and from mothers of soldiers—are not the least among the treasures that Miss Foster cherishes.

"Then you think that it is worth while for the composer of serious music to write a song that may be called 'popular'?" was the natural query.

"Yes," was the prompt reply; "the great masterpieces of literature, of painting, of statuary, have been inspired by the simple things of life that we all share in common. The song composer who finds a text that has in it a message of cheer, of hope, of courage or inspiration and who can illuminate that text so that its message goes home to the hearts of all of us—that man or woman may well be proud to have written a 'popular' song."

MAY STANLEY.

### Paul Althouse Foregoes Dessert to Sing "Butterfly"

It was the "end of a perfect dinner" at the ménage Althouse that the telephone bell rang violently, and the tenor, just in the act of putting the "finishing" touches to an apple pudding, was informed by an excited voice from the sacred Metropolitan Opera House that Martinelli was taken suddenly ill and that the performance of "Madame Butterfly" had to begin in half an hour. Quite neglected remained his favorite dessert as Paul Althouse made a dash to the opera house, and scarcely thirty minutes later was singing the impassioned love music of *Pinkerton* to the dainty *Butterfly* of Geraldine Farrar. Another example of "preparedness."

### Boston Orchestra in Brooklyn Concert

To the minds of the large Brooklyn audience who gathered at the Academy of Music on Friday evening, Dec. 6, the Boston Symphony Orchestra has again found itself under the conductorship of Henri Rabaud. All the old finish was there, all the old brilliance of execution and sureness of attack and release, and

lastly, all the old inspirational flashes of emotional color which places the orchestra on such a high plane. Mr. Rabaud has, in a few weeks, ripped his forces into marvelous shape. He was given an enthusiastic welcome by the large audience which filled the opera house of the Academy. His program featured a Beethoven Symphony in A major, a Chopin Concerto in E minor, and the Saint-Saëns "La Jeunesse d'Hercule." No less a pianist than Josef Hofmann played with the orchestra in the Chopin number. Mr. Hofmann's playing needs no word of criticism. He is primarily the artist, and his execution and interpretation brought forth gasps of wonder and vociferous applause on the part of his audience.

A. T. S.

On Dec. 12, Anna Case, the soprano, will sing for the Friday Afternoon Musical Club of Paterson, N. J., and on Dec. 16 for the Silver Cross Circle of Plainfield, N. J. She has the distinction of having sung in more New Jersey towns than any other artist, her list including Atlantic City, Newark, Ocean Grove, Trenton, New Brunswick, Montclair, Summerville (where she was born). Eliza-